Supporting preschoolers in the Least Restrictive Environment:

During the early years of a child's life, the foundation is laid for all later development and learning, including critical skills and dispositions for academic learning, relating to others and becoming positive contributors to peer groups, families and communities. Children develop these skills through active participation with their peers, their families and their communities in contexts which include, but are not limited to, home, preschool, child care, play groups, libraries, parks and places of worship. All young children, including those with disabilities, are dependent upon the experiences and opportunities available within the context of everyday life to build a solid foundation for learning and development (State of Illinois Guidance Paper, 2005).

Opportunities for joint participation and learning must exist for preschool children on IEPs and their same-age, typically developing peers. Odem (2000) states that a preschool environment must include a "critical mass" of typically developing children in order to develop rich relationships and support the learning of <u>all</u> children. Children with disabilities learn from, interact with and form friendships with their non-disabled peers through interactive participation in activities and routines throughout the preschool day.

An inclusive setting is considered to be one in which at least fifty percent of the children are typically developing. As the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children expands, more opportunities and options for inclusive environments will be available. In the meantime, school districts consider a full range of options, including those in and out of district buildings and purview, to provide inclusive settings for children on IEPs.

Benefits of Inclusive Settings

Benefits for children with disabilities include, but are not limited to:

- o Children are spared the effects of separate, segregated education including the negative effects of labeling and negative attitudes.
- o Children interact with competent peer models to assist in the acquisition of new skills, including communication and appropriate social relationships.
- Children participate in realistic life experiences that prepare them to live in the community.
- Children have opportunities to develop friendships with typically developing peers.

Benefits for children without disabilities include, but are not limited to:

- o Children learn about and developing realistic views of individual with disabilities.
- o Children develop positive attitudes towards those different from themselves.
- o Children learn and practice altruistic behaviors.
- o Children interact with models of individuals who are successful and persevere despite challenges.

Benefits for communities include, but are not lmited to:

- o Communities conserve their early childhood resources by limiting the need for segregated, specialized programs.
- o Communities focus on quality early childhood programs that support all children.

Benefits for families of children with disabilities:

- o Families learn more about typical development.
- o Families feel less isolated from the community.
- o Families of all children in the inclusive setting develop relationships and create a support system.

Faith-based Programs

If the IEP team determines that an appropriate setting for a child is a faith-based religious preschool, the preschool must ensure that :

- o The classroom meets one of the required program standards:
 - National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation;
 - o Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards (QPPS); or
 - o Head Start Program Performance Standards.
- o Instruction supported by federal, state or local funds is "secular, neutral and non-ideological".
- o Children are not compelled to participate in any religious instruction or activity.
- o Public funds are not used to support religious instruction.

Examples of settings for LRE include:

In all settings where a child receives instructional services, a special education teacher must monitor the child's progress toward the IEP goals.

- LEA's may prepay tuition to a community-based early childhood program to reserve spaces for children who may become eligible for Part B instructional services throughout the school year.
- Districts with multiple Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) classrooms expand the number of classrooms and enroll children from the community on a tuition-basis. Each classroom offers preschool programming where more than 50% of the children are non-disabled.
- Children from an ECSE classroom are integrated with children from Shared Visions program, Head Start or Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children.
- The LEA provides space in the school for an early childhood center. The school houses an ECSE classroom, Head Start, community-based child care center and preschool. This center provides an array of LRE options.
- For multiple days per week the local preschool program and the ECSE program combine to form one classroom with two teachers. The early childhood and ECSE teacher plan together.

An IEP is implemented in a district preschool with at least 50% of typically developing children for three hours per day and then she goes to a child care center where there are more than 50% typically developing peers for six hours per day.

An IEP is implemented in an ECSE setting where there are 30% typically developing peers for three hours per day and then he goes to a child care center for six hours per day where there are more than 50% typically developing peers.

A speech only IEP is implemented by the speech therapist at his home school and there are no other children present AND Noah spends the rest of the day in a child care center with more than 50% typically developing peers, use the "A" setting code.